

FREE RESOURCE — GUIDE

Google Ads Campaign **Setup** **Guide**

A step-by-step guide to setting up high-performing Google Ads campaigns from scratch — from account structure and keyword research to ad copy, conversion tracking, and your first 30 days of optimisation.

8.5x

AVERAGE ROI
FROM GOOGLE
ADS

3.75%

AVERAGE CTR
FOR SEARCH
ADS

8

SETUP
SECTIONS
COVERED

4–8h

ESTIMATED
SETUP
TIME

SEARCH

SHOPPING

PERFORMANCE MAX

FIRST 30 DAYS

PREPARED FOR

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00

How to use this guide

Setting up a Google Ads campaign correctly from the start saves you thousands in wasted spend. This guide walks through **eight essential steps**, from initial account configuration to a structured 30-day optimisation plan that ensures your campaigns start strong and improve continuously.

This guide is designed for **business owners, marketing managers, and PPC beginners** setting up Google Ads campaigns for the first time or rebuilding an underperforming account. Follow each section in order for the best results — estimated setup time is **4–8 hours** for a well-researched campaign.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

Owner-operators launching their first paid search campaign, in-house marketers building out a new Google Ads account, and PPC beginners rebuilding an account that has stalled. Tick the launch checklist and complete the worksheet directly in any modern PDF viewer.

Before you start — and what to avoid

Before You Start

- Define your campaign goals (leads, sales, calls)
- Know your target audience and geography
- Have your landing pages ready
- Set a realistic monthly budget
- Prepare a list of your products / services
- Have access to Google Analytics

Common Setup Mistakes

- Launching without conversion tracking
- Using only broad-match keywords
- Sending traffic to the homepage
- Not setting geographic targeting
- Skipping ad extensions entirely
- Using automated bidding without data

Campaign basics

Business Name	
Campaign Goal	
Monthly Budget	

01

Account Setup & Structure

A well-structured account makes campaign management, reporting, and optimisation far easier. Set the foundation right from day one — choices made now are difficult to reverse later.

Create or access your Google Ads account at ads.google.com. Use a business email and link to a Google Analytics property.

Set your time zone and currency correctly during setup — these cannot be changed later without creating a new account.

Link Google Analytics 4, Google Tag Manager, and Google Business Profile in the Linked Accounts section before launching campaigns.

Plan your campaign structure before building. Separate by service / product line, geography, or campaign type.

Use a consistent naming convention for campaigns and ad groups (e.g. *Search_IT-Support_London_Exact*) so reports stay legible at scale.

Create shared negative keyword lists before launching — add common exclusions (free, jobs, DIY, second-hand, etc.).

RECOMMENDED ACCOUNT STRUCTURE

Campaign Level: group by service / product and campaign type. **Ad Group Level:** group by keyword theme or product variant. **Example:** Campaign “Search_Managed-IT_London” Ad Groups: “IT Support London”, “Managed IT Services London”, “IT Outsourcing London”.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Time zone, currency, and account-level negatives cannot be retrofitted without painful migrations. Investing one extra hour in account structure on day one saves dozens of hours of cleanup over the lifetime of the account.

02

Campaign Type Selection

Choose the right campaign type based on your goals, your audience, and where they are in the buying journey. The wrong type wastes spend even with perfect targeting and creative.

CAMPAIGN TYPE	BEST FOR	KEY FEATURES	WHEN TO USE
Search	High-intent leads & sales	Text ads on Google SERPs	Core campaign for most businesses
Display	Brand awareness & remarketing	Visual ads across 3M+ websites	Retargeting & top-of-funnel reach
Shopping	E-commerce product sales	Product images, prices in SERPs	Online stores with product feeds
Video (YouTube)	Brand awareness & engagement	Video ads before / during content	When video creative is available
Performance Max	Multi-channel automation	AI-driven across all Google channels	Accounts with strong conversion data
Demand Gen	Discovery & social-style ads	Gmail, YouTube, Discover feed	Visual brands targeting interest

IMPORTANT — START WITH SEARCH

Start with **Search campaigns** if you are new to Google Ads — Search captures high-intent users actively looking for your product or service. Only add Display, Video, or Performance Max once your Search campaigns are profitable and conversion tracking is proven.

A COMMON MISTAKE

Enabling Performance Max on a brand-new account before any Search baseline exists. Without conversion data, PMax has nothing to optimise against and will spend the budget across channels with no feedback loop. Earn the right to PMax with Search first.

03

Keyword Research & Planning

Thorough keyword research ensures you target the right search terms and avoid wasting budget on irrelevant clicks. Treat keywords as a living asset — the list you launch with is never the list you end with.

Use Google Keyword Planner to find keyword ideas, search volumes, and competition levels for your products / services.

Group keywords by intent — informational (learn), navigational (find), commercial (compare), transactional (buy).

Focus on commercial and transactional keywords first as they have the highest conversion potential.

Include long-tail keywords (*3+ words*) that are highly specific, often cheaper to bid on, and easier to win.

Analyze competitor keywords using tools like SEMrush, Ahrefs, or SpyFu to find gaps and opportunities.

Build negative keyword lists during research to proactively block irrelevant terms before launch.

MATCH TYPE STRATEGY

Exact match [keyword]: highest control, lowest reach — best for proven high-volume terms.

Phrase match “keyword”: moderate reach with intent matching — a good starting point. **Broad**

match keyword: maximum reach but requires Smart Bidding and strong negatives — use only with data-driven strategies.

DON'T SKIP NEGATIVES

The single biggest source of wasted spend on new accounts is launching without a negative keyword list. Start with category-wide negatives (*free, jobs, DIY, salary*) and review search-term reports every 2–3 days for the first month.

04

Writing High-Converting Ad Copy

Your ad copy is the first impression users have of your business. It must be relevant, compelling, and action-oriented — the right words at the right moment are worth more than any bid adjustment.

Headlines (up to 15)

Include the target keyword in at least 3 of your 15 headlines to ensure ad relevance.

Lead with your strongest value proposition — what makes you different from competitors?

Include numbers and specifics where possible (*"Save 30%", "24/7 Support", "Rated 4.9/5"*).

Write clear calls-to-action — "Get a Free Quote", "Book a Demo", "Shop Now".

Create variety — include benefit-focused, feature-focused, urgency, and social-proof headlines.

Descriptions (up to 4)

Expand on your headlines with more detail about benefits, features, and the offer.

Address common objections (*no contracts, free consultation, money-back guarantee*).

End with a CTA that tells the user exactly what to do next.

Use all available character space — longer descriptions give Google more options to optimise combinations.

AD STRENGTH TARGET

Aim for **"Good"** or **"Excellent"** ad strength on every RSA. Google explicitly states that ad strength directly impacts the ability of your ad to serve. Use diverse headlines that offer different messages rather than repetitive variations.

05

Setting Up Conversion Tracking

Conversion tracking is non-negotiable. Without it, you cannot measure ROI or use automated bidding effectively — every campaign decision after launch depends on accurate conversion signals reaching the account.

Install the Google Ads global site tag (or use Google Tag Manager) on every page of your website.

Create conversion actions for each valuable action — form submissions, phone calls, purchases, chat initiations.

Set conversion values where possible — even estimated lead values help Smart Bidding optimise more effectively.

Choose the right attribution model — data-driven attribution is recommended when you have enough conversion data.

Enable enhanced conversions to capture more conversion data in a privacy-centric world.

Test every conversion action by completing a real submission and verifying the tag fires in Google Tag Assistant.

Import Google Analytics 4 conversions for actions tracked in GA4 that are not tracked natively in Google Ads.

ESSENTIAL CONVERSION ACTIONS

Primary: form submissions, phone calls, purchases — these drive bidding optimisation.

Secondary: page views, time on site, PDF downloads — useful for reporting but should not be included in bidding.

VERIFY BEFORE YOU LAUNCH

A campaign launched with broken conversion tracking is invisible. Always fire a real test conversion in Tag Assistant, confirm it appears in the Google Ads UI within 3 hours, and only then enable bidding.

06

Budget & Bidding Strategy

Set realistic budgets and choose the right bidding strategy based on your data maturity and campaign goals. The wrong strategy at the wrong stage hides results and stalls learning.

Setting your budget

Calculate your daily budget by dividing your monthly budget by 30.4 (average days per month).

Start conservatively — allocate budget to your highest-priority campaign first and expand as you prove ROI.

Account for Google's overspend — Google can spend up to 2x your daily budget on any given day (but not over monthly).

Choosing a bid strategy

STRATEGY	GOAL	WHEN TO USE
Manual CPC	Full control over keyword bids	New accounts with no conversion data
Enhanced CPC	Manual with smart adjustments	Transitioning to automation
Maximise Clicks	Drive traffic volume	Awareness campaigns or data gathering
Maximise Conversions	Get the most conversions	Accounts with 15+ conversions / month
Target CPA	Hit a specific cost per acquisition	Accounts with 30+ conversions / month
Target ROAS	Hit a specific return on ad spend	E-commerce with revenue tracking

BUDGET TIP

Never set a budget that limits your best-performing campaign. If your top campaign is “limited by budget”, either increase the budget or redistribute from over-performing campaigns — budget-limited campaigns miss high-value clicks.

07

Launch Checklist

Before you hit “Enable” on your campaigns, run through this pre-launch checklist to avoid costly mistakes on day one. Tick each item once it is verified live in the account.

Account & settings

- ☐ **Billing** is set up with a valid payment method.
- ☐ **Time zone and currency** are correct.
- ☐ **Google Analytics 4** is linked to the Google Ads account.
- ☐ **Google Tag Manager** container is installed on the website.

Campaign settings

- ☐ **Geographic targeting** is set to “Presence” (*not “Presence or Interest”*) for local businesses.
- ☐ **Language targeting** matches your audience.
- ☐ **Search Partners** are disabled initially (*enable later after testing*).
- ☐ **Ad rotation** is set to “Optimise” for RSAs.
- ☐ **Ad schedule** is configured if your business has specific operating hours.

Keywords & ads

- ☐ **Keywords** are in the correct match types with no accidental broad match.
- ☐ **Negative keyword lists** are applied to all relevant campaigns.
- ☐ **RSAs** have “Good” or “Excellent” ad strength in every ad group.
- ☐ **All ad extensions** (*sitelinks, callouts, structured snippets, calls*) are configured.

Tracking & landing pages

- ☐ **Conversion tracking** is verified with real test submissions.
- ☐ **Landing pages** load in under 3 seconds on mobile.
- ☐ **Final URLs** are correct and point to relevant live pages.
- ☐ **UTM parameters** are appended for GA4 tracking.

08

First 30 Days Optimisation Plan

The first month is critical. Follow this week-by-week plan to optimise your campaigns based on real performance data, not gut feel.

WEEK 1

Monitor & collect data. Check daily: budget pacing, impression share, ad disapprovals. Review search terms every 2 days and add negatives. Ensure conversion tracking is recording correctly. Do not make major changes yet — let the algorithms learn.

WEEK 2

Refine keywords & ads. Add high-performing search terms as keywords. Pause keywords with high spend and zero conversions. Review ad strength and improve underperforming RSAs. Check device and location performance for early trends.

WEEK 3

Optimise bids & budgets. Shift budget toward campaigns and ad groups with the best CPA or ROAS. Increase bids on top-performing keywords. Consider switching from Manual CPC to Maximise Conversions if you have 15+ conversions. Test new ad copy variations.

WEEK 4

Analyse & plan. Compile a full performance report: CTR, CPC, CPA, ROAS by campaign and ad group. Identify top and bottom performers. Set targets for Month 2. Plan A/B tests for landing pages and ad copy. Share results with stakeholders.

DO NOT OPTIMISE TOO EARLY

Smart Bidding strategies need **conversion data** to perform — typically at least 15–30 conversions in the first 30 days. Pausing keywords, changing budgets, or switching bid strategies in Week 1 resets the learning phase and delays performance. Be patient in Week 1, decisive in Weeks 2–4.



Campaign Setup Summary

Use this worksheet to document your campaign decisions and capture week-by-week performance numbers across the first month. Fill it in directly in your PDF viewer or print it for the team.

Campaign details

Campaign Name _____

Campaign Type _____

Geographic Target _____

Daily Budget _____

Bid Strategy _____

Primary Conversion _____

Target CPA / ROAS _____

Month 1 performance summary

METRIC	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
Impressions	_____	_____	_____	_____
Clicks	_____	_____	_____	_____
CTR	_____	_____	_____	_____
Conversions	_____	_____	_____	_____
CPA	_____	_____	_____	_____
Spend	_____	_____	_____	_____



Key Learnings & Next Steps

Translate the first month into concrete next steps. Document what worked, what did not, and the top three changes for Month 2 — then lock in a sign-off and a date for the next review.

Top 3 priorities for Month 2

01

02

03

Notes & observations

Sign-off

COMPLETED BY	DATE	NEXT REVIEW

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info@cloudswitched.com

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CLOUDSWITCHED

GOOGLE ADS & PPC SERVICES

info@cloudswitched.com

New London House, 6 London St
London EC3R 7LP · United Kingdom